WHIRRAKEE

January/February 2012 Vol. 33 No. 1

Registered by Australia Post. Publication No. VBH4462

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO

FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Address for correspondence: PO Box 396, Bendigo 3552. Web address: www.BendigoFNC.com.au
ISSN 0812-423X

Office Bearers for 2011 - 2012

President	Jan Orr	5443 5668
Senior Vice President	Matthew Comer	0409 162627
Junior Vice President	*position vacant*	
Secretary	Stuart Fraser	5443 1326
Minute Secretary	Anne Bridley	
Treasurer	Ben Goonan	
Membership Officer	Anne Bridley	5442 6188
Excursion organiser	*position vacant*	
Syllabus organiser	Ben Goonan	
Librarian	Diana Collier (an assistant is still required)	5443 0137
Garden Convenor/Secretary	Matthew Comer	0409 162 627
Hall Management	Maurie Lewis (assisted by Rob Moors)	0407 427179
Whirrakee contact	Sabine Wilkens e-mail: s.wilkens@latrobe.edu.au	5443 2797
Whirrakee mailing coordinator	Rod Orr	5443 5668

Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $34; Family $40; Concession: Single $28.50; Family $34. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $34.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The meeting starts with a 10 minute thing-of-the night natural history segment. The invited speaker starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper. The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 6:00pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearer listed above and the following members: Anne Bridley, Glenise Moors, Joy Clusker, Kerrie Norris, John Lindner.

Excursions are conducted regularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. Several interclub field naturalist campouts are held every year.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club has one sub-group (the Fauna Study Group) and is actively involved in local conservation issues. An **indigenous garden** has been established around the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building. Working bees are advertised on the *Whirrakee* diary page.

Fauna Study Group: Chairman: John Burtonclay, Fadersons Lane, Mandurang (5439 5710)
Secretary: Bill Holsworth, 13 Nabilla Crs., Bendigo (5443 4063)
Equipment Officer: Maurie Lewis (0407 427179)
Regular fauna excursions take place most Fridays. See page 11 for details.

Bird Observing: Club members conduct regular bird surveys. Please contact Anne Bridley 5442 6188 or Glenise Moors 5439 6254 for details. Special bird observations should be reported to Anne Bridley 5442 6188.
To propose bird observing excursions please contact Kerrie Norris 5447 8017.

Front cover photo?...see page 2

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club

Vol. 33, No. 1, January/February 2012

Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*) which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

CONTENT

Item	Contributor	Page
Short Notices		3
Colour Photo section	various wonderful photographers	4-7
Identity crisis or just fun?	Karen Thomas	8
News from the watertable	Phil Dyson	8
BFNC speakers form February till June 2012	Ben Goonan	9

Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles. Contributions will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although articles received more than one week after the monthly General Meeting will probably be too late for inclusion in the next issue of *Whirrakee*.
Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editor's Note
A real summer, with many consecutive hot days and that lingering holiday feeling and slightly slower pace for many people is a wonderful thing. But we have nearly reached the end of it, and have to start the year proper, hopefully with lots of energy. Why not use some of that energy to volunteer in some capacity for our club. Even if you are not a committee member, you can get involved in one of the many projects that are undertaken. These range from joining excursions with the Family Nature Club, writing submissions, lobbying politicians or other people in decision making, or simply contributing to the Whirrakee *by writing articles and submitting interesting photographs. Whatever the case, I am looking forward to your contributions this year.*
My apologies to Rod Orr whose marvellous summer-flowering plant photos arrived a minute before the magazine had to go to print. They will be something to look forward to in the next edition.

Front page photograph: **Photographer: Dale Little**
The photo shows a trapdoor that Peter and Dale Little saw recently (between Christmas and New Year), when going for a walk at Melville's Caves. There are so many things about this construction that are awe-inspiring and simply beautiful. The power of evolution is sometimes beyond belief!

Short Notices

Membership Renewal

If your *Whirrakee* has a red dot last month, it means we do not have a record of your payment of your membership fee for the 2011/12 financial year. If you wish to continue to receive *Whirrakee*, please pay by December 31. If you have already paid, please ignore the notice.

Frogs, frog eggs and tadpole identification

Bill Holsworth reported that the NCCMA has launched a new field guide for the identification of frogs, frog eggs and tadpoles in the region.

If anyone would like a free copy, limited editions are available from the north Central CMA offices, located at 628-634 Midland Highway, Huntly. Phone 5448 7124 or email info@nccma.vic.gov.au

The Family Nature Club may also benefit from this field guide if they have not already received it.

To save you all going out to the Huntly office, it is hoped that a number of copies will be available at the February Club Meeting.

Wombat Forestcare

In December, I received, via Stuart Fraser, the latest Wombat Forestcare Newsletter. It is a fantastic production, and I encourage you investigate their website (from where the newsletter can be accessed and also membership of this organisation (ed.)

Wombat Forestcare Inc. is dedicated to preserving the biodiversity and amenity of the Wombat State Forest by utilising the skills and resources of the community. By becoming a member you will have input into our activities and projects, and give support to caring for our forests.

For memberships and further information contact Gayle Osborne, phone 03 5348 7558 or email info@wombatforestcare.org.au

Membership fees are only $10 single and $15 family. Visit our website – www.wombatforestcare.org.au

SEANA March Camp

You are invited to the SEANA March Camp at Camperdown, hosted by the Timboon Field Naturalists Club 16- 17- 18- 19 March 2012.

Autumn, in the western district, includes magnificent vistas, spectacular volcanic forms and wetlands full of birds, we hope. The camp is based at Camperdown among the lakes and craters of the western district.

Excursions are planned to visit Lake Toolirook and Mt. Elephant to the north, guided tour of Mt. Shadwell quarry, plus sites including Mt. Noorat to the west, Red Rock and Lake Corangamite in the east. Explore volcanic formations, Ramsar Lakes, Stoney Rises, fresh and saline wetlands, birds, remnant vegetation and Camperdown's, Mt. Leura, Lakes Gnotuck and Bullen Merri.

Saturday and Sunday Dinner, Speakers and meeting will be at the Camperdown Golf Club. Lake Gnotuck.

Please arrange your own accommodation. Camperdown has a range including caravan park, hotels , motels and B&Bs. other areas Lake Purrumbete s/c cottages and caravan park 10 km east. Cobden 14km south or Terang 22km to the west.

Contact Sabine Wilkens for the page with accommodation suggestions (incl. prices). The booking form is on page 10.

Common Mynahs in Bendigo

Bendigo resident Bernard Cannon is interested in doing something about the increased number of Common Mynahs in Bendigo. If any club members would like to help him with this, he can be contacted on 5441 6680.

A few minutes of spare time?

It's a shame really – there is so much good information 'out there' and never enough time to explore it all. If you have a few minutes, check out the 'Ants at War' and other fantastic things on the *Scientific American* website: http://www.scientificamerican.com/

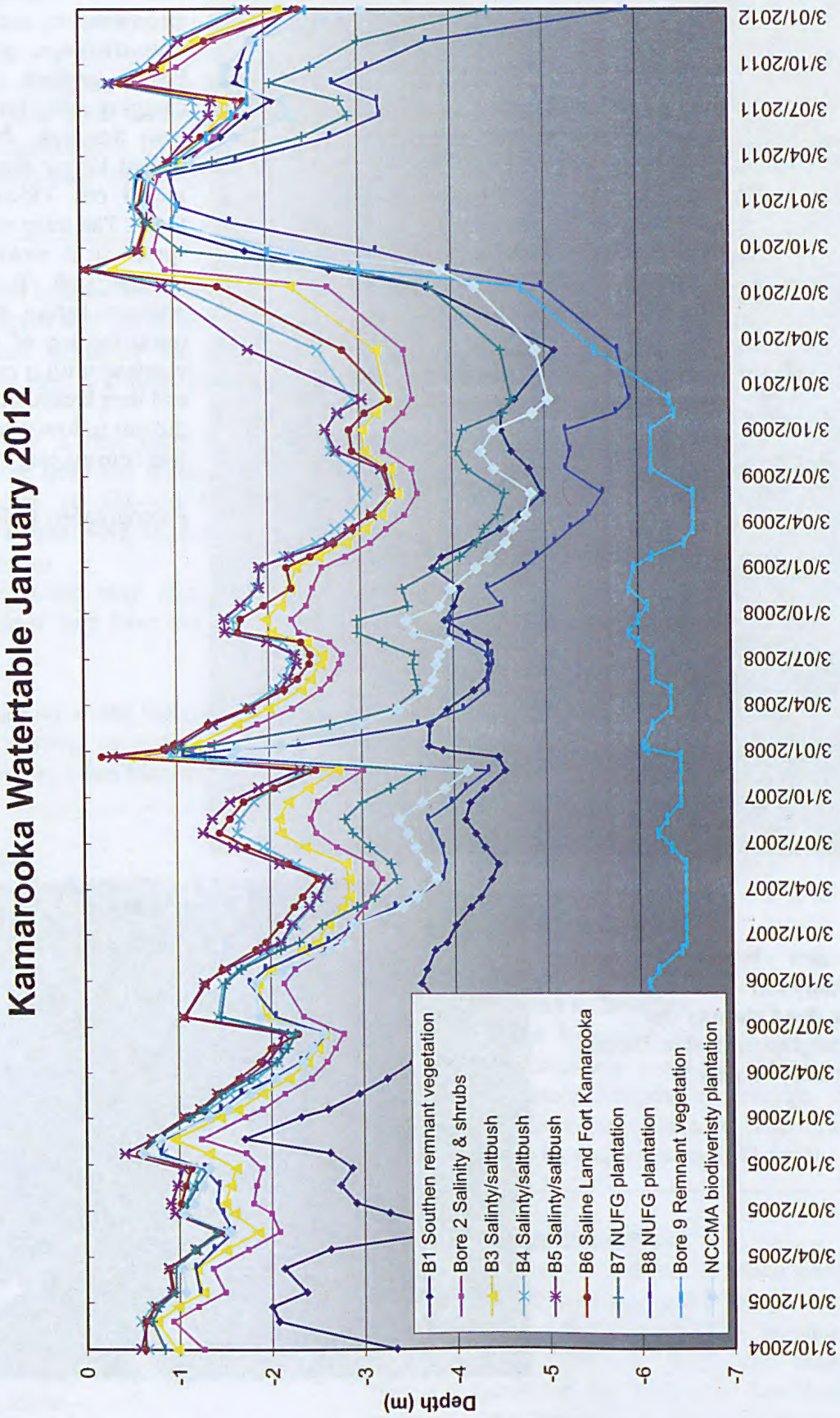
Animal behaviour you don't often witness…

Nature is still happening and interesting in central Bendigo. This afternoon, while watering, Peter noticed this wasp dragging away his victim. S/He was dragging the huntsman, almost bigger than itself, as it scaled our 135cm high front fence. The wasp was pulling the spider as it moved backwards up the wall. It took several attempts before it managed to reach the top of the wall. We watched it till it reached the top and then kicked ourselves as we did not follow it to see where it was constructing its nest.

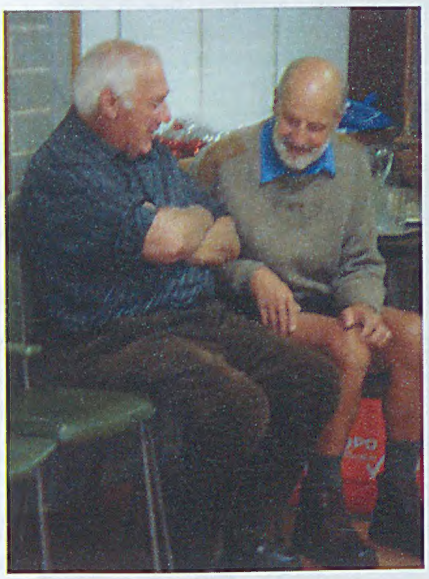
Photographer: Dale Little

A new breed of aquatic stumpy tail
or a dead stumpy tail?
Photographer: Karen Thomas
See story on page 8

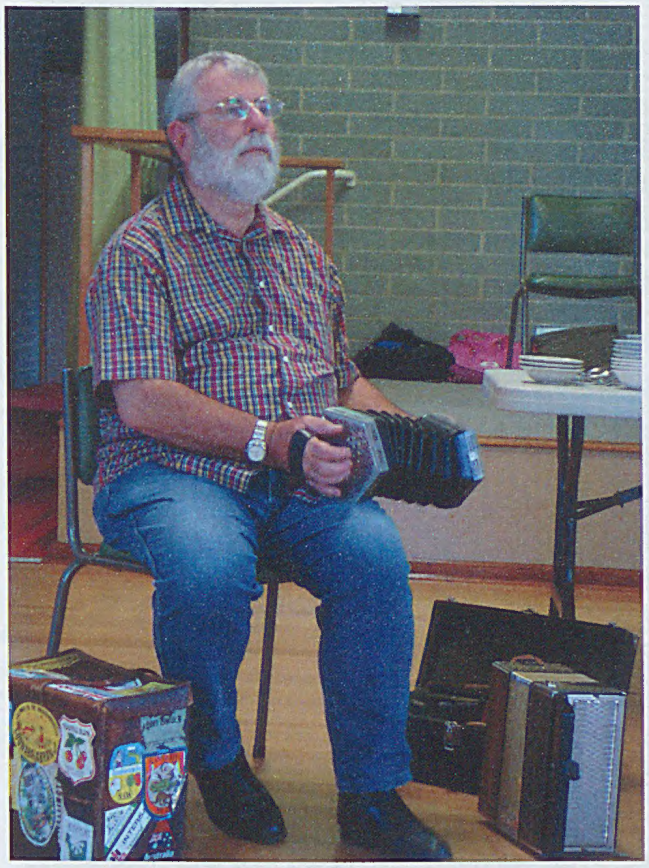
What's happening at Kamarooka? This amazing graph has been provided by Phil Dyson. It shows the watertable changes since 2004 underneath various types of vegetation. See story on p. 8.



December club meeting…the topic for the December meeting was 'a trip down memory lane'



Good company…



Good music…

Good food…

and good memories…

…were enjoyed by old and young.

Thanks to all the wonderful and generous cooks who provided the sumptious dinner

Summer observations

Identity Crisis or Just Fun?

by Karen Thomas *(the author makes no apology for any anthropomorphic connotations)*

Having recently become a neurotic "dommy" *lingua franca for dog mummy*... after one said dog was heard to be barking in what is meant to be ..... *"What's this mum?.....Come have at look!!!!!"*
YES!!!!!!!! ....a one metre brown snake in front garden climbing up my Westringia bush!... after my baby Blue Wrens!!!... well that's another story ... I am now on '*beck and bark'* to anything dog says (*sorry.. barks*) to discover a stumpy tail sitting in the dam water.
"Awh poor thing it must be sick or dying ..maybe I should put it out of its misery ..no, I 'll wait til' tomorrow to see if it's any better."
So instead it was moved to a safer spot.....well according to me... about 30 metres away only to find that a few hours later it's back in the water..!!! *"What's going on here?" You'd think I'd learnt from an earlier venture with a baby grey shrike thrush as some of you will remember!!!!*
Well it was, a cold day and the water did feel warmer than the air so I'm thinking ... *temperature regulation perhaps?*
Over the next few days the stumpy was either sunning itself, crawling around near the house, in a rock crevice or in the water.....*thank god I didn't euthanize it..proud of myself for not interfering with nature this time....still ... I couldn't help prodding it every time I 'd see it in the water, sometimes under and not moving just to check if it really was alive ... .but every time it was... alive!* It would from time to time, say every minute or so release a few bubbles from its nostrils, come up for a breath of Mandurang air , rest then crawl back down for a bit of a romp amongst the decaying leaf litter only venturing about 20-30 cm deep.
Curious...does it think it's a crocodile... well perhaps from an ant's perspective .....or maybe an Amphibian?.....*well it's not for me to say really but it does look like its having fun...!!!!!!*

News from the Watertable

Author: Phil Dyson

On page 6 you will find a graph depicting the latest set of results for the NUFG Kamarooka saltland reclamation project.

The most interesting aspect of these latest results is the dramatic fall in watertable under the 2004 plantation over the past couple of months. The depth to watertable as measured in bore 8 at the centre of the plantation is now 5.91 metres. It has fallen more than 2 metres since I last measured it in mid-November 2011. The floods in 2010 and 2011 brought the watertable within 1 metre of the land surface. It has now receded back to where it was in December 2009. It is clear the trees have delivered this outcome through transpiration of high salinity groundwater.

The groundwater has also receded along the southern edge of the 2004 plantation. This can be seen in the records from bore 7, which is located about fifty metres inside the plantation. The fall in groundwater across the non-forested/forested boundary is a little over 2 metres. The watertable at bore 6 located 30 metres south of the plantation is 2.36 metres compared with 4.41 metres some fifty metres inside the plantation. Again, this dramatic fall in groundwater in such a short distance illustrates the impact of the plantation.

Once again, we see that the fall in groundwater is common to all Kamarooka lands that support woody vegetation including the biodiversity trial. Note that the watertable recession measured at bore 10 at the centre of the biodiversity trial is similar to that under the plantation. The watertable at bore 10 is now a little over 3 metres from the land surface.

This low rainfall that prevailed throughout a good deal of 2011 has also seen a small groundwater recession within the land supporting saltbush and native grasses. The watertable in these non-treed lands ranges from 1.8 to 2.5 metres from the land surface.

Other observations
The trees remain very healthy and continue to grow quite vigorously. Most are now at least 8 metres high and show no signs of stress in spite of their location over shallow saline groundwater. This consolidates our view that they are able to withstand very high levels of salt in their root zone, and even transpire high salinity groundwater. The thing that kills them is waterlogging and salinity together. The Kamarooka plantations were inundated during the floods but not for long periods of time.

Need to improve our monitoring network
Given the above results we should be thinking about establishing a deeper bore adjacent bore 8 in the centre of the 2004 plantation. The existing bore was designed to record the influence of the trees on shallow groundwater at a time when the watertable was less than 2 metres from the land surface. Now the watertable has fallen to almost 6 metres we have almost depleted our monitoring capacity. The bore is screened (slotted to allow water entry) over the interval 5 to 6 metres and has an unscreened sump below this to a depth of about 7 metres. Accordingly, if the watertable drops below 6 metres this fall will not be recorded in the data we collect. It would cost about $3,000 to drill an additional bore.

The reason we might want to establish an additional bore is that the data we have collected to date has caused us to re-think many of the things we believed we knew about trees over shallow saline groundwater. With that new knowledge on board there are new questions to be answered. The picture is incomplete without knowing how far the plantations can pull the watertable down.

BFNC speakers for February till June 2012

Organized and coordinated by Ben Goonan

08/02/12
John Arnott
Manager Horticulture, Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne
"RBG Cranbourne: Where horticulture meets ecology"

14/03/12
Dr Libby Rumpff
School of Botany, University of Melbourne
"Evaluating woodland restoration strategies"

11/04/12
Dr John Morgan
Plant Ecology Lab & Research Centre for Applied Alpine Ecology, Department of Botany, La Trobe University
"The 'Inch Flora': morphology, seed biology and ecology of annual plant species of the semi-arid woodlands and grasslands of Victoria"

09/05/12
Attilla Kapitany
Australian Succulent Plants
"Australian and local succulent plants"

13/06/12
David Stewart
Entomological Society of Victoria
"Observations from Mt Korong"

Booking form for SEANA -

Camperdown

March 16th - 19th, 2012
Hosted by the Timboon Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Name: 1. _____

Name: 2. _____

Address: _____

_____

_____ postcode _____

Email address: _____

Phone: _____ Mobile: _____

Club Name: _____

Booking Fee: $90 per person. Total: $ _____

Registration includes: Dinner Saturday and Sunday nights at Camperdown Golf Club.

*** Please make cheques payable to:
Timboon Field Naturalists Club Inc Camp and send completed form and payment to:
TFNC SEANA CAMP, 670 Cobden-Terang Road, Cobrico. 3266

or Direct Credit to:

Account Title: TIMBOON FIELD NATURALIST CLUB INC CAMP

BSB 063-849

Account No: 1010 7507

Reference No: Please print your SURNAME as a Reference on the Direct Credit so that the payment will be recorded against your name.

*** Please return Registration form and payment by 28th February, 2012

Diary

All Club meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High St Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

Wednesday, February 8 7.30pm
The first meeting of the year will have John Arnott, the manager of Horticulture at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Cranbourne, speaking about 'RBG Cranbourne: Where horticulture meets ecology'.

Wednesday, March 14 7.30pm
The speaker in March is Dr Libby Rumpff, School of Botany, University of Melbourne. Her topic is 'Evaluating woodland restoration strategies'.

Regular Fauna Excursions
Every Friday morning starting at around 9 to 9:30 the Fauna Group inspects nest boxes in the Spring Gully area. The excursions are led by Maurie Lewis, 16 Vains St. Golden Square. Phone 0407 427 179. Phone Maurie to confirm exact departure times and location. If you don't phone and go directly to Maurie's house and find nobody at the house between 9 and 9:30, then the excursion is not on.

Cane Toads and the Emma Gorge Scientific Expedition 2011
Wednesday, February 22 - 7.30pm at the BFNC club rooms in Golden Square.
The Australian Geographic Society (AGS) hosted a scientific expedition base camp within the Kimberleys to better understand the area's wildlife before the imminent arrival of cane toads. The 'hands-on' team of scientists and conservation volunteers recorded a multitude of rarely seen fauna including, birds, reptiles, butterflies and fish. Volunteer - Tony Spurling will present a selection of his photographs and explanation of his role during this biodiversity survey.

Family Nature Club
Check out their 2011 and 2012 activities at http://bendigofamilynatureclub.blogspot.com/
Registration:
Bendigonatureclub@gmail.com or 5443-1326

SEANA March Camp at Camperdown.
Hosted by the Timboon Field Naturalists Club. 16- 17- 18- 19 March 2012.
For details see page 3.

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.
W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals. It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Sustainability and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.

Saturday 19th May, 1.30 - 2.30pm

Owls of the forest

This presentation will be on three nocturnal species - Tawny frogmouth, Southern boobook and Australian owlet-nightjar. Our guest speaker is Marian Weaving who is a PhD Candidate on the Tawny Frogmouth Project from the School of Life and Environmental Sciences at Deakin University.

Friday 15th June, 7.00 - 9.00pm

Exploring the froggy world

Come along and learn about your local frogs, what they look like, sound like and where they live. Open your eyes and ears to the beautiful wet world around you. Elaine Bayes and Damien Cook, local ecologists will explore the froggy world with you and share their ecological experiences. 1 hour lecture, 1 hour frog walk.

Where: Trentham Neighbourhood Centre, High St, Trentham. **Cost:** Gold coin donation on the night. **Bookings:** Trentham Neighbourhood Centre (03) 5424 1354 Email **trentham@ourneighbourhood.org.au**